

## Glimpse of Oregon 4-H History

It was in 1911 that the Board of Regents of Oregon Agricultural College established the Oregon Extension Service, the same year that L.R. Alderman, state superintendent of public instruction, took action that became the foundation for today's 4-H program.

Actually, the roots of 4-H in Oregon reach back to 1904 when Alderman, then Yamhill County school superintendent, organized the first boy's industrial club in his home community of Dayton. The idea spread and industrial club work appeared in Yamhill, Polk and Benton counties in 1905. Done through the schools, the industrial club movement consisted mainly of a fair at which boys and girls could show articles which they had made or animals they had raised.

When Alderman became state superintendent of public instruction in 1911, he obtained funds from the state bankers' association and the Union Stock Yards Company of Portland to hire two assistants to spread the work throughout the state, setting the stage for modern 4-H. His two assistants worked with county school superintendents to create interest in the fair idea.

The work was continued, thanks to an appropriation by the 1913 session of the Oregon Legislature which also authorized the conduct of juvenile industrial work under the direction of the state superintendent. That same legislative session also passed the laws which enabled Oregon counties to appropriate money for Extension work and which authorized Oregon to participate in the Extension education effort called for when Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act in 1914/

The early industrial work gave little attention to the teaching of subject matter. At the same time, work with youth in agriculture and home economics was being considered as an appropriate function of the national Extension movement then taking shape.

In 1914, with agreement from the state superintendent of public instruction, the Oregon Extension Service employed F.L. Griffin as the first state leader of industrial clubs. His task was to assist the State Department of Education by bringing the resources of the OSU Schools of Agriculture and Home Economics into the youth programs.

A formal agreement between Extension and the State Department of Education was signed in 1916 which gave Extension the responsibility for supervising and direction boys' and girls' industrial work. The program was to be conducted in cooperation with county school superintendents and teachers.

The work was then redirected to organizing major activities of farm and home into definite projects. Each project contemplated a year's or a season's productive effort along practical and economic lines.

That first year, ten activities were selected for club work. Club projects were corn growing, potato growing, vegetable growing, poultry raising, pig raising, dairy herd record keeping, sewing, cooking, canning, and woodworking. Over 11,000 youngsters participated.

Griffin resigned as state leader and H.C. Seymour, Polk County school superintendent, was named state leader in 1916. He was one of a three-person team that was to define and shape 4-H in Oregon for many years.

Joining the state staff in August, 1914, was Helen Cowgill. L.J. "Doc" Allen was named state pig club agent in October, 1915. Seymour and Cowgill retired from Extension on June 30, 1947. Allen remained as state leader from 1947 to August 1952.

Because of Seymour's vision, Oregon became the first state to offer 4-H work in a metropolitan area. Portland school grounds were used for victory gardens in World War I. Seymour worked to bring these groups into 4-H with support from the Portland school district, the PTA, and others at the end of 1918-1919 school year.

The Portland School District provided funds to help hire an Extension agent to do 4-H work in the city. For many years there were two Extension offices in Multnomah County. An office in Gresham was responsible for urban 4-H and home economic programs before being combined with the Portland office.

Seymour, Cowgill, and Allen worked to establish 4-H Summer week on the OSU campus. The first such program was held in 1916. The three pioneering leaders were honored in 1965 when 4-H Summer Week observed its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Three benches on "lower campus" near the intersection of 13<sup>th</sup> and Jefferson streets were dedicated in their honor.

Involvement with the state's public schools continued to be an important part of 4-H until the 1950's. Teachers often served as 4-H leaders; volunteer adult leaders gave instruction in the classroom. However, at the same time, there was growing movement towards the organization of 4-H clubs outside the schools and gradually the role of 4-H clubs in the schools diminished.

In later years, a new partnership between Extension's 4-H program and the schools has emerged. It's called "school enrichment" and is designed to expand the learning offered to youngsters. Programs about nutrition, plant and soil science, natural resource, and animal science provided by Extension are used in the classroom.

At the same time, the number of Extension staff members with 4-H responsibilities gradually increased. In 1922, there were full-time Extension 4-H

agents in Tillamook, Multnomah, Klamath and the City of Portland. Three other agents, in Jackson, Douglas and Malheur counties, divided their time equally between 4-H and agriculture programs.

Enrollment over the years show that 4-H is truly a popular program with young people. During the first 50 years, Oregon usually had a higher percentage of eligible boys and girls in 4-H than any other state west of the Mississippi. In 1936, for instance, enrollment was about 22,000 members nearly 20 percent eligible. In 1960, enrollment was more than 33,200 young people, with more than 45,000 boys and girls with more than 7,500 adults volunteering as leaders.

Although 4-H work is supported by state, local and federal governments, participation by the private sector has been an important aspect from the very beginning. Businesses, organizations and individuals have sponsored various awards and prizes and made it possible for 4-H'ers to attend national and statewide events.

The importance of the private financial support was recognized in 1958 when the Oregon 4-H Foundation was formed. The Foundation raised funds to support 4-H programs as well as to operate the Oregon 4-H Center, a natural resource and camping facility in Polk County's Eola Hills.

Volunteer leadership has also been important throughout the years as adults give their time and talents to help young people learn. Oregon's 4-H program is organized around project clubs, for the most part, which meet regularly throughout the year.

As appreciation of the role of education in one's life has been a feature of 4-H since the early years. In more modern times, 4-H Youth Exchange delegate was chosen and sent to New Zealand. Oregon participated in this privately-financed people-to-people program for many years, sending young people to live with families in other nations while hosting visiting IFYE's here.

The international scope took another jump in 1972 when the 4-H Japanese Exchange program was initiated. Each year, a small group of Oregon 4-H'ers travel to Japan, while Oregon families host about 150 Japanese youth and adults in their homes.

Animal Science and Home Economic project remain the keystones of Oregon 4-H, but the program has expanded to include other curriculums such as Horticulture, Natural Science, Engineering and Expressive Arts. Most recently, programs relating to societal issues such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and after school child care education have been introduced.